



Discussion Guide

Cultivating our ground—Exodus 3.1-12

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o What does it take to really get your attention?

Setting the Stage: *God desires to use each of us, like Moses, to lead people out of bondage to Himself. Amazing. Intriguing. Oh, and yes, frightening. Honestly, it makes many of us say, “Who am I?” Who are we indeed? Certainly we are not a people capable of such a task. Or are we? If so, how might we become such a people? What did it take for Moses? When we consider his life we discover that Moses became the person God needed him to be through an intentional journey into the wilderness. Moses had to break from life to become available to God. We can learn a great deal from Moses. If we want to be the people God can use, it takes breaking from life to become available to God. It takes a journey to the wilderness. That much is clear. What isn't clear is whether we will go. Are we willing to break, to journey to the wilderness? Are we willing to disrupt the routine, our own agendas to cultivate our lives so that we might participate in the agenda of God?*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Exodus 3.1-12.
- In what ways did Moses make himself available—intentionally or unintentionally—to God?
- How did God respond to Moses' availability?
- Considering Moses' life in Exodus 1-2, what was it about his time in the wilderness that might have made Moses more available and receptive to God?
- Moses journeyed to the wilderness and stayed there. In so doing, he prepared himself to meet with God and join Him in what He was doing. What might going to the wilderness look like today?
- Do you think that modern wilderness journeys might be necessary to prepare ourselves to meet with God and join Him in what He is doing? Can you elaborate?
- In what ways are you making wilderness journeys to be available to God? Do you feel that God has your full attention or do you need to press further into the wilderness? Can you explain further?
- What feelings does the prospect of breaking to enter the wilderness bring up in you? Where do you think these come from?
- In what ways, if any, do you feel you might need to move into the wilderness to meet with God? How might we support and encourage you in that journey?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o Housekeeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

Group Notes

Cultivating our ground: Exodus 3.1-12

Context and Background

Exodus: The book of Exodus continues the story of Genesis, tracing the history of Abraham's descendents. The family of Abraham traveled to Egypt to live under the care of Joseph during a time of famine (Genesis 42-50). They never left, but settled and began to multiply as a people. However, as they grew as a people so did the concern of the Egyptians. The Egyptians, fearing a revolution fueled by the Israelites living in their land, chose to enslave Abraham's people. The book of Exodus begins with the people of Abraham in bondage and describes the process by which God uses a single man, Moses, to rescue them. Some would argue that Exodus is thus a book about God's redemption. While Exodus certainly provides a vivid portrait of God's redemptive activity, the book also provides insight into the life God desires for Abraham's people through the giving of the Law and the description of the Tabernacle. One possible way to understand Exodus is that it is a moving depiction of God's activity to deliver His people from one life in order to deliver them to another life. The life to which God is moving His people is one in which He lives among them (Tabernacle) and one in which relationships with people and God Himself are restored (Law). As such, the book of Exodus foreshadows the activity of Christ himself, activity that delivers people from one life to the life God desires for all people.

Angel of the Lord: The angel of the Lord which appears in Exodus 3 appears throughout the Old Testament as a figure used by God to act on behalf of the nation of Israel. The main question that surrounds this figure involves his identification. At certain points, this figure is clearly an agent sent by God to act for His people (Exodus 23.23, 32.34; 2 Samuel 24.16; 1 Chronicles 21.27). At other points, the angel of the Lord seems to be closely identified with God Himself (Genesis 16.13; Judges 6.14, 13.21-22). Such is the case in Exodus 3. The angel of the Lord is the figure that appears to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3.2) and yet it is God Himself who speaks from the bush (Exodus 3.4). Instances like this have led some to speculate that the angel of the Lord is a form of pre-incarnate Christ. That is, Jesus is taking on human form before being born. Such suggestions are not necessary and are not in keeping with the nature of true incarnation. One need not speculate as to the nature and timing of God's incarnation apart from what is described in the Gospels. Rather, we may accept that in certain instances in the Old Testament, God chose to make Himself known in visual ways. We learn at least two important points from these appearances. First, we see that God wishes to be known. God does not desire to be distant but wishes to draw near. This does foreshadow the work of Christ without taking away from it through speculation. Second, we find that God is willing to limit Himself in order to accommodate people's ability to encounter Him. That God appears as the angel of the Lord and not in the fullness of His glory indicates a limiting of His fullness. The reason for such limiting is beyond full understanding. However, one might reason that God limits Himself so as not to overcome sinful humanity as the presence of a Holy God among an unholy people might prove devastating to the very lives of those witnessing God's glory (See Isaiah 6).

The Text

Moses' availability (Exodus 3.1-4): Exodus 3 begins with Moses shepherding sheep in the wilderness. That Moses is in the desert is somewhat surprising. Born of Hebrew parents but raised in Pharaoh's household, Moses should be shepherding people, not sheep. Yet, in the desert is where he is found. His own attempts to rescue his birth-people blew up in his face and he has been reduced from being an active member of the Egyptian royal family to something of a foreign hired hand (Exodus 2.11-25). What is important to note is that Moses is alone in a place known to be God's crucible. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the wilderness was a place where people went to be still and meet with God (consider the lives of Moses, Israel, Elisha, Elijah, and Jesus). While Moses is in the wilderness to tend his sheep, he has—wittingly or unwittingly—placed himself right where God can work in his life. In the wilderness he has freed himself from the normal distractions of life, allowing his soul to settle and become open to the overtures of God. God seizes the opportunity that Moses provides Him and chooses to appear to Moses (see *Angel of the Lord*). Because Moses has made himself available to God in the wilderness, he sees God's appearing as a burning bush and turns aside. He is able to break from his life to meet with God (Exodus 3.4).

God's availability (Exodus 3.5-12): When Moses made himself available to God—intentionally or unintentionally in the wilderness—God made Himself available to Moses. God met Moses in a physical and intimate way reaffirming His commitment to Moses' people the Israelites. God knew the present struggle of the Israelites and remembered His promises to Abraham. Therefore, God was going to deliver the Israelites from their bondage and take them to a land of promise, and He wanted to use Moses to do it. Moses' response is understandable. Who was he to deliver the Israelites? He had already attempted as much and failed. Deliverance was not something Moses was capable of accomplishing. God's response is intriguing. Inasmuch as Moses had made himself available to God, so God was making Himself available to Moses. He would be with Moses enabling him to deliver the Israelites so that they too might enter the wilderness and meet with God. God promised to be present with Moses so that Moses might lead others to be present for God.

Application: God has great purposes for people. He longs to have an intimate and up-close relationship with them. He longs for people to experience life as it was meant to be from the beginning of time. He desires to use His people, those who follow Christ, to bring people into this relationship. That is, God desires to use each of us like a Moses, to which many of us rightly reply, "Who am I?" Who are we indeed? Certainly we are not a people capable of such a task. Or are we? If so, how might we become such a people? Following the example of Moses, we discover that becoming such a people begins by making ourselves available to God. It is in the intentional journey to the wilderness that we find ourselves open and available to God, a God who in turn is available to us and to use us for His great purposes.